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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000149

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SUBJECT: GOI THOUGHTS ON PEACE PROCESS AND SAINT PATRICK'S DAY

Classified By: Ambassador James C. Kenny for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Begin Summary. On January 30, the Taoiseach, the ministers of foreign affairs and justice, and other senior Irish officials told Special Envoy Mitchell Reiss that the GOI would like to see the Northern Ireland institutions restored in 2006 on the basis of the Good Friday Agreement. The foreign ministry painted the rosier picture; the Taoiseach was more realistic about the challenges. He said he did not expect major breakthroughs until after the April IMC report, since the February IMC report did not give a clean bill of health to Sinn Fein and the IRA. The Taoiseach noted that the White House Saint Patrick's Day events were significant. He said that his meeting with the President is what the Irish government most values, but that there would also need to be a Northern Ireland dimension. In the Taoiseach's view, the most effective tactic would be to invite all the parties as members of a large reception, but not to do a special event for them and not to pick a Northern Ireland-based theme, as in recent years. The Taoiseach felt that excluding the parties would simply give them an excuse to play the martyr card; including them in a larger reception would give the President an opportunity to deliver a clear message to all parties. At a private luncheon, President McAleese and Dr. McAleese suggested that more involvement by the U.S. with loyalist militias (specifically, a meeting with the Special Envoy) would help move these groups to decommission. End Summary

Taoiseach, Collins Discuss the Peace Process and the DUP

2. (C) Michael Collins, Secretary General and senior Foreign Affairs advisor to the Taoiseach, reviewed the Taoiseach's meeting with PM Blair several days previous. He said that the two agreed that the institutions should be back up within the year but decided against setting a public deadline. He noted that there was discussion of publicly saying that the institutions should be up before the marching season begins, but that the risks of not meeting a precise deadline were too high. He said the two prime ministers also had agreed "to churn the process" in order to keep Ian Paisley's DUP party on edge. The regular meetings between FM Ahern, Northern Secretary Hain and the parties are designed to keep the

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pressure on the DUP, as are efforts to strengthen North-South cooperation. Asked how far down the road the GOI would take North-South cooperation, Collins indicated that the Irish government would be prepared to have the GOI and HMG make more decisions together on administering Northern Ireland but is uncertain how far the UK is prepared to go. The Taoiseach joined the meeting at this point, and said that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) would oppose joint Irish-British decision making and that to date, "Number Ten does not deal with the micro issues" of governing northern Ireland.

3. (C) Discussion about DUP intentions followed, with Collins repeating the view that it is hard to read Ian Paisley, that one moment he seems to want to see the institutions up so that he can be First Minister and the next moment, he seems to want to end his days the way he has lived them: railing against nationalists and refusing to share power with Sinn Fein. Practically, Collins agreed, there is not much incentive for DUP to engage now. DUP believes that a post-Blair British government would be more in its interests and it is not facing any pressure from its constituents to stand the institutions up.

4. (C) The Taoiseach said there are two ways of moving the DUP. One way is to publicly blame the DUP for lack of movement, but that is not the best move tactically. The other way is re-engagement on North-South elements of the Good Friday Agreement, including more ministerial meetings and using the North-South and East-West bodies to take substantive decisions in areas such as fire fighting, establishing an all-island register of pedophiles, and coordinating infrastructure spending, such as on roads, electricity and telecommunications. Collins added that while the GOI was considering points of leverage on the DUP, it was not planning to use them until after the talks among FM Ahern, Northern Secretary Hain and the parties had gotten

underway.

A Deal in 2006?

5.(C) We asked Collins and the Taoiseach to clarify the difference between the GOI's determination in public and at the DFA to see the institutions up this year and their own seemingly more pessimistic view of bringing DUP along. Collins said that they are watching to see if the ongoing talks with the parties create a momentum and show the DUP that the ship is turning, thereby encouraging them to engage.

16. (C) The Taoiseach said that at this moment, the DUP wants to drag talks out until elections in Ireland and the UK, both likely in 2007. He said that the GOI will keep talking with the DUP but that the GOI "can only play along so long. We need to make political decisions at some point. We also need to see what nationalists do, especially as they protest lack of reciprocity from the DUP." After the April IMC report, the Taoiseach said, "no one will have patience with DUP." "Never in their life have the DUP made a positive decision," said the Taoiseach.

17. (C) The Taoiseach said that if the DUP did not engage in the process, he would consider giving a speech in which he reminded people that the Republic of Ireland had changed its constitution to relinquish its claim to Northern Ireland only on the basis of the promise of the Good Friday Agreement. If that promise is not met, he said, he would indicate that Ireland could consider changing its constitution again. Comment: that Ireland relinquished its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland was a major change and a cornerstone of the Good Friday Agreement. The Taoiseach's comment that he would consider suggesting Ireland could go back on that is stunning. He confided that he has already mentioned this scenario to Blair. While it is unlikely that Ireland would revisit the constitutional issue, a speech from the Taoiseach even hinting that they might would have major repercussions. Given that 2007 is an election year for the Taoiseach, it is certainly possible that the Taoiseach would give such a speech, strengthening his nationalist credentials before voters go to the polls. End Comment.

Saint Patrick's Day

18. (C) The Taoiseach opened discussion of Saint Patrick's Day events in Washington by saying that he could "see the dilemma" the U.S. might be facing in trying to decide whether or not to invite the parties. He repeated that the most important aspect of the day was his meeting with the President and an emphasis on the bilateral relationship. At the same time, he said, the best way to handle the parties was to invite them all, cut out any special Northern Ireland-focused ceremony and simply include them in a low-key way in the general reception. The President, he said, could address the parties collectively, in an even-handed way. He could offer credit where credit was due, such as on decommissioning, but could also send a clear message to the parties, including on policing. In this way, the USG could give an impetus to talks to restore the institutions. On the other hand, excluding the parties would simply give them the martyr card they both like to play. "It's always an advantage to northern parties to be excluded" he said.

President and Dr. McAleese Discuss Loyalists

19. (C) Over lunch, President McAleese expressed the view that the DUP would not move without pressure, and that the "gradual greening of the north" is likely to be the most effective pressure. London's approach, she said, has always been appeasement. Martin McAleese briefed Ambassador Reiss on his contacts with loyalist militias, the desire of many within this group to play a more positive role, and their frustration at being isolated, by the DUP as much as by the NIO. Dr. McAleese broached the idea that a meeting between some of the loyalist leaders and the U.S. Special Envoy for Northern Ireland could help move the loyalists toward decommissioning.

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